

## OBITUARY

### MARGARET (BIDDY) BRIDGET MILLS (NEE EDWARDS)

Born: Bullfinch, 21 June, 1916

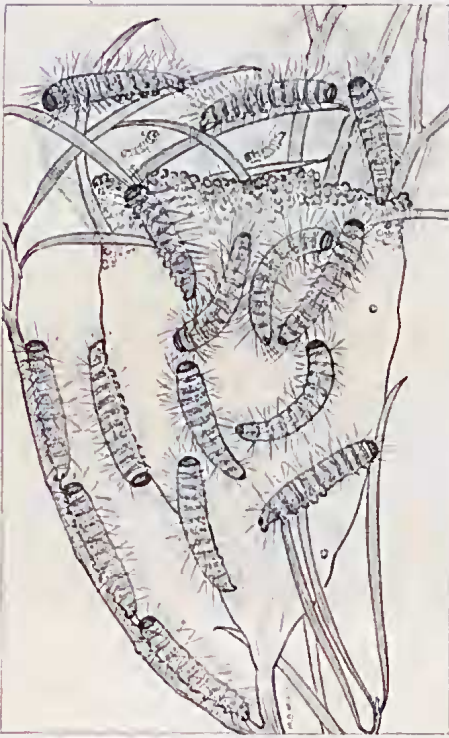
Died: Merredin, 12 February, 2008



Mrs Mills as a young woman during her research into plants and animals (photo courtesy Wheatbelt Mercury)

Biddy Mills was a familiar person in Merredin for many years. She was born in Bullfinch on 21 June 1916. Her family were farmers near Burracoppin, then Nangeenan west of Merredin. Finally they moved to Merredin to a house in Chandler Rd near the

Hunts Dam Reserve. She used her extensive long term observations of this reserve as the basis for an article in the journal, *The Western Australian Naturalist*, (1975) and a booklet, *Beautiful Hunt's Dam Reserve and Its Flora* (1991?). She attended schools in Nangeenan



Drawing of caterpillars published in the *Western Australian Naturalist* vol. 3 p. 65 in 1951

and Merredin. She later studied Commercial Art through the Art Training Institute (Melbourne). Bidy married Harry Mills in 1937 and lived on a farm near Merredin.

Her interest in natural history was a lifelong one – herding cows when a child in the bush near Chandler Rd, living her married life on a farm surrounded by uncleared bush, engaging in research with others and recording her observations. She joined the Western

Australian Naturalists' Club prior to 1948 (date is uncertain but she was listed as a member in the membership list published in *The Western Australian Naturalist* in 1949). Dr Joseph Gentilli of UWA approached her to collect fungi for him and she also put her art training to good use: drawing and painting specimens. After this Dr Dom Serventy (the co-founder of the Club and editor of the Club's publications) asked her to research the processionary caterpillar, *Ochrogaster contaria*. This work resulted in a number of articles in the Club's journal, *The Western Australian Naturalist*, notably on processionary and bag shelter caterpillars (see publication list at end of this article).

In the late 1960s, she was approached by Dom Serventy to conduct research on the quandong (*Santalum acuminatum*). In 1972 she published an article in the *Journal* entitled *Observations on the Heavy Fruiting of Quandong Trees during the Drought Year of 1969*. This article attracted the attention of Dr Mark Buttrose of the CSIRO in Adelaide who was interested in growing quandongs to make jams and chutneys. He collected fruit, seed and soil from her and a farm was set up at Quorn in South Australia. Bidy published her observations in two articles in the *The Western Australian Naturalist* in 1977 and 1978. A number of farms growing quandongs now exist in the eastern states. Bidy and a friend



Photo of *Grevillea paniculata* photographed by Mrs Mills in the 1950's (original in Club library)



Drawing of *Grevillea paniculata* based on previous photograph (original in Club library)

would make jams and chutneys every season and a booklet of recipes was compiled, *Quandong recipes*.

In cooperation with the Merredin Tourist and Information Centre, she also put on record her recollections of her early days in Merredin in a number of small books which are held in the Battye Library. Merredin Shire Council has honoured her contributions by purchasing her portrait, painted by Ken Rasmussen, which now hangs in the Harling Library.

In 1974 she was made an honorary life member of the Western Australian Naturalists' Club for her services in natural history research and public education.

Mrs Mills died in Merredin on 12 February 2008, aged 91 years. She had made significant contributions to our knowledge of natural history of the Merredin area.

**Articles published by Mrs Mills in the *Western Australian Naturalist***

Mills, M.B. 1948. A Bull-ant combat. *Western Australian Naturalist*, 1: 155-156.

Mills, M.B. 1950. Observations on Processionary Caterpillars. *Western Australian Naturalist*, 2: 84-87.

Mills, M.B. 1951. Bag Shelter Caterpillars and their Habits Part 1. *Western Australian Naturalist*, 3: 61-67.

Mills, M.B. 1952. Bag Shelter Caterpillars and their Habits Part 2. *Western Australian Naturalist*, 3: 84-92.

Mills, M.B. 1954. Observations on the Life History of the Moth *Anthela zantharca* (Meyrick). *Western Australian Naturalist*, 3: 86-90.

Mills, M.B. 1971. Occurrence of Bathurst Burr in Virgin Country. *Western Australian Naturalist*, 12: 48.

Mills, M.B. 1972. Observations on the Heavy Fruiting of Quandong Trees during the Drought Year of 1969. *Western Australian Naturalist*, 12: 55-56.

Mills, M.B. 1974. Absence of the Pallid Cuckoo at Merredin, 1973. *Western Australian Naturalist*, 13: 24.

Mills, M.B. 1975. The Flora of Hunt's Dam Reserve, Merredin. *Western Australian Naturalist*, 13: 44-45.

Mills, M.B. 1977. Observations on Quandong trees, *Santalum acuminatum*. Part I. *Western Australian Naturalist*, 14: 15-17.

Mills, M.B. 1978. Observations on Quandong Trees. Part II. *Western Australian Naturalist*, 14: 46-50.

#### Books in the State Library

*Beautiful Hunt's Dam Reserve And It's Flora*. 1991? 31p Merredin Tourist Bureau.

*Beyond Recall* [Photography By Barbara Abell] 1993 34p Merredin Tourist and Information Centre.

*Coondambo: A true story of Early Settlers on a Remote Sheep Station, Coondambo, South Australia: their determination, fortitude and success in a lonely and forbidding environment*. 1992 27p. Merredin Tourist and Information Centre.

*A Link With Time: A Personal History Of Early Days In Merredin District*. 1987, 53p.

*A Link With Time: A Personal History Of Early Days In Merredin District*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1992.70p (Edited) Merredin Tourist and Information Centre.

*The Other Side Of The Coin: A Look At Merredin And Surrounding Areas Then And Now Through The Eyes Of Margaret Bridget Mills*. 1990? 74p. Merredin Tourist and Information Centre.

*Quandong Recipes*, compiled By Margaret Bridget Mills. 199? 4p.

*Realistic Poems Of Real Life*. 1999 26p.

*Strange Happenings On Chandler Road: Murder, Suicide*. By Margaret Bridget Mills. 2nd ed., rewritten and corrected by Jim Medlen. 2002

- MARGARET LARKE